



IT'S SALT LOCH CITY

A visit to part of Utah that is forever inspired by Scotland

By Paul English

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DISCLAIMER: You're about to read an article about skiing in the hills around Ben Lomond.

But references to lethal mud patches or pouring rain, giant queues at Glencoe Ski Centre or long drives home along the hellish A82 will not be made.

Instead, there'll be praise of top ski facilities, first-class dining – and a nod to the local Mormon population.

This isn't skiing in the shadow of Ben Lomond at the gateway to the Scottish highlands.

It's playing around on the white stuff in the ski areas of the Wasatch mountains, a range in the Rockies surrounding Salt Lake City, Utah, in America's mid-west.

And it's all in the shadow of a mountain named by 19th century Scottish immigrants, the same one which went on to become the studio logo for Paramount Pictures.

There are two popular misconceptions about Utah – it's entirely alcohol-free and every man there has nine wives.

Locals scoff politely at polygamy the same way as we laugh about the Loch Ness Monster.

Slogan

While some extremist Mormons do have "in" and "out" doors on their houses, it's by far the exception rather than the rule. Similarly, alcohol might not be the cornerstone of every night out but it's anything but a dry state – there's even a local ale called Polygamy Porter.

The State want to convey a different image. According to the slogan on every car licence plate, Utah has "The Best Snow In The World".

Having only skied in four countries, my own research into this claim is probably every bit as scientific as theirs – ie not very.

But having now experienced skiing at seven resorts within striking distance of Salt Lake City, I'm confident Utah offers an abundance of great skiing opportunities in America – although that's not the snappiest of licence-plate slogans either.

Having hired kit at one of the ski hire outlets downtown, we drove between seven resorts over five days, all within an hour's drive from SLC: Alta (a "no snowboarder" zone), Snowbird, Solitude, Snowbasin, Deer Valley, Park City (complete with

white knuckle Alpine roller-coaster) and Sundance.

Fans of the European ski-in ski-out experience will favour Park City and Deer Valley, both calling to mind some of Europe's more chi-chi spots. For uncrowded piste cruising, the aptly-named Solitude ticks all boxes, with Snowbasin's long blue runs perfect for intermediates and families.

Snowboarding students enjoying beers in the lively bars of Park City – a town, not really a city – told me they often bet each other to ride into "ski-only" resorts from neighbouring areas, posting footage of the proof online.

I'm assured that the sound of blasts echoing around Alta was the avalanche control team at work and not snipers taking out trespassing boarders.

As is often the case in America, the historical tendrils of Scottish immigration emerge easily. There's

a bizarre Scottish souvenir shop in Salt Lake City, a stone's throw from Salt Lake Temple, aka Mormon HQ. There are Scottish-inspired

fittings and fixtures in the Needles Lodge restaurant at Snowbasin where Rich, our mountain guide, revealed a taste for gritty Scottish flicks Red Road and Sweet Sixteen.

Both were cultural hangovers from the annual film festival at Robert Redford's nearby Sundance, itself a boutique ski resort celebrated for ecological principles, sumptuous spa and unparalleled apres-ski options. Even on a one-night stay, including floodlit skiing, a buffalo steak dinner and a hot stone massage, I saw what all the fuss was about.

The skiing over, I set my sights on less crowded terrain and struck out to experience Utah's other main draw and the iconography of the "wild" west in Navajo territory on a solo road-trip through snowy desert

and canyons. Destination: Monument Valley, 500 miles south of Salt Lake City in the vast Navajo reservation, bordering Utah and Arizona.

Think of any John Wayne/John Ford classic movie collaboration and you're there.

The miles were broken by overnight stops in the desert town of Moab, itself a hub for outdoor enthusiasts with kayaking on the Colorado River, visits to Canyonlands (Thelma and Louise's final resting point) and hiking in the awe-inspiring Arches National Park just some of the local options.

A visit to the vast magnificence of Gooseneck Point, where the San Juan river meanders through towering canyons, cannot be recommended highly enough. Half an hour here is the epitome of solitude. Next day, powered by the home-baked breakfast muffins of Dundee man Howard Trenholme –

a radio DJ who also runs Moab's



funky Red Rock bakery, playing Travis and Franz Ferdinand to his desert customers – I motored south towards those massive sandstone forms.

Approaching from the iconic “photo-stop” point on US 163, they grew, breathtakingly, from inch-high Lego-bricks to imposing skyscrapers. This view’s known locally as “Gump Hill” after Forrest Gump stopped running there in the Tom Hanks film – one of many 20th century references locally attributed to the results of millions of years of natural history. If you look at a certain rock in Monument Valley a certain way, it’s “Snoopy”,

or so my Navajo guide told me on a sunset trip through the valley, where tribesfolk tolerate visitors taking pictures on their sacred land.

The guided tour was every bit as mesmerising as the promise conveyed by those old John Wayne films – on hire, authentically enough, at the nearby Gouldings Lodge reception.

It truly is the pinnacle of Utah’s sightseeing opportunities.

So, 10 days in the 45th US State, 1100 miles, seven ski resorts, all producing a lifetime of memories. With a permanent reminder forever looming closer to home over the banks of Loch Lomond, I won’t have to look too far to remember them.



BEAUTIFUL: At Gooseneck Point

FACTFILE

FLY: Glasgow to Salt Lake City from £335 or Edinburgh from £420 with Delta/KLM. American Airlines also fly there from the UK.

SKI RENTALS: Ski ‘n’ See, skinski.com.

Accommodation: Hampton Inn, Salt Lake City hamptoninnsaltlake.com; Ogden Marriott, marriott.com; The Yarrow Park City, yarrowresort.com; Gouldings Lodge Monument Valley, gouldings.com; Sundance, sundanceresort.com.

VISIT: Monument Valley: nps.gov/arches; Arches National Park: nps.gov/arches; Goosenecks State Park: stateparks.utah.gov/parks; stateparks.utah.gov/parks;

DETAILS: www.skiutah.com; www.utah.travel



